

## Book Reviews

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*America nuova terra promessa: Storie di ebrei italiani in fuga dal fascismo.*

By Gianna Pontecorboli.

Milan: Francesco Brioschi Editore, 2013.

205 pages.

Gianna Pontecorboli's book vividly describes the migration to the United States of some 1,000 Italian Jewish scientists, scholars, artists, musicians, bankers, lawyers, and other professionals and their families after the introduction of the Fascist regime's anti-Semitic laws in 1938. While German, British, and American historians have devoted considerable attention to the flight from Nazism and Fascism of many other Jewish artists, scientists, and intellectuals during the 1930s, the Italian case has been mostly overlooked.

Jewish migration from Italy after 1938 was an important phenomenon. Mussolini's government passed the first of a series of anti-Semitic laws during the fall of 1938 that affected more than 48,000 Italians. The laws barred Jews from public life and subjected them to a wide range of humiliating restrictions and persecution. Among other things, these laws barred Jewish students and teachers from attending and teaching in public schools and universities. They barred Jews from marrying non-Jews, from working in a long list of professions, serving in the army, employing Christian servants, staying in hotels, and even placing classified ads in newspapers. More than one hundred primary-school directors and teachers were expelled for being Jewish. At this same time, at least 279 administrators and teachers from middle school and hundreds of full professors and *liberi docenti* ( untenured professors) were banned from universities.

Chapter 1 describes the tragic difficulties of leaving, such as obtaining an affidavit or a quota visa to reach the United States. After the promulgation of the Racial Laws, a small segment of Italy's Jews—scholars, scientists, and university professors among them—began leaving the country. Pontecorboli draws a picture full of key individuals, families, friendships, and professional networks and examines a number of cases, dividing them into scholars, doctors and journalists, musicians and artists, and “non solo Nobel” (not only Nobel), a revealing look at lesser-known, but still well-established scientists and mathematicians.

Among the more significant cases Pontecorboli describes is the closing of the Turin School of Biology, founded by the histologist Giuseppe Levi. His students Salvatore Luria, Renato Dulbecco, and Rita Levi-Montalcini all fled to the United States and went on to become Nobel Prize winners. In medical schools, physiology, more than any other discipline, lost the most prominent faculty members. Geographer Guido Almansi, literary scholar Attilio Momigliano, and philosopher Rodolfo Mondolfo were also forced to flee. So were the mathematicians Salvatore Pincherle, a creator of infinitesimal calculus; Vito Volterra, who established the basis of functional calculus; Corrado Segre, who established the Italian school of geometry; and Tullio Levi-Civita, who developed absolute differential calculus. Turin mathematician Guido Fubini, forced to leave his post in 1939, joined the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

The influential group of young Roman nuclear physicists led by Enrico Fermi, known as the “ragazzi di via Panisperna” also disbanded: Fermi (who won the Nobel Prize in 1938), Bruno Rossi, Emilio Segrè (also a Nobelist), and Eugenio Fubini emigrated to the United States. Fubini went on to be appointed U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense in 1963. Mario Salvadori and Roberto Fano and his brother Ugo Fano were among the other scientists and scholars forced to leave. Using their stories, Pontecorboli points out the difficulties in settling in to a new place, in the process of becoming integrated, and in rebuilding their careers.

Pontecorboli identifies broad characteristics of this migration of Jewish intellectuals: Entire families left, and men and women were equally represented. These migrants were typically older than those who left earlier, and they tended to settle quickly in urban centers.

The author pays careful attention to the women who fled, some of whom arrived in the United States unmarried or unaccompanied. One was Gina Castelnuovo, a biologist and daughter of mathematician Guido Castelnuovo. Pontecorboli notes that women, whether as wives, daughters, or certainly colleagues, demonstrated a greater capacity than men for adaptation and learning in a new society.

Pontecorboli has written an original and informative book. One of the merits of *America nuova terra promessa* is the coverage of the immediate aftermath of the war, a difficult phase for those refugees and their families who decided to return to Italy and participate in postwar reconstruction, just as much as it was for those who remained in the United States and needed to deal with the challenges of displacement and discrimination.

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*Farms, Factories, and Families: Italian American Women of Connecticut.*

By Anthony Riccio.

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014.

422 pages.

In an effort to capture the range of experiences of a group that has been relatively ignored—Italian American women workers—Anthony Riccio traversed the state of Connecticut over a period of six years. During that time, he interviewed more than 165 working- and lower-middle-class Italian American women, affording them the opportunity to share accounts of their own lives in their own words. Many of the stories collected by Riccio trace the trajectory of these women’s experiences from the time of emigration from Southern Italy across three generations in the United States. Their accounts capture lives not only as women during these times but as Italian American immigrant and working women. For many of Riccio’s subjects, this was an important and defining distinction.